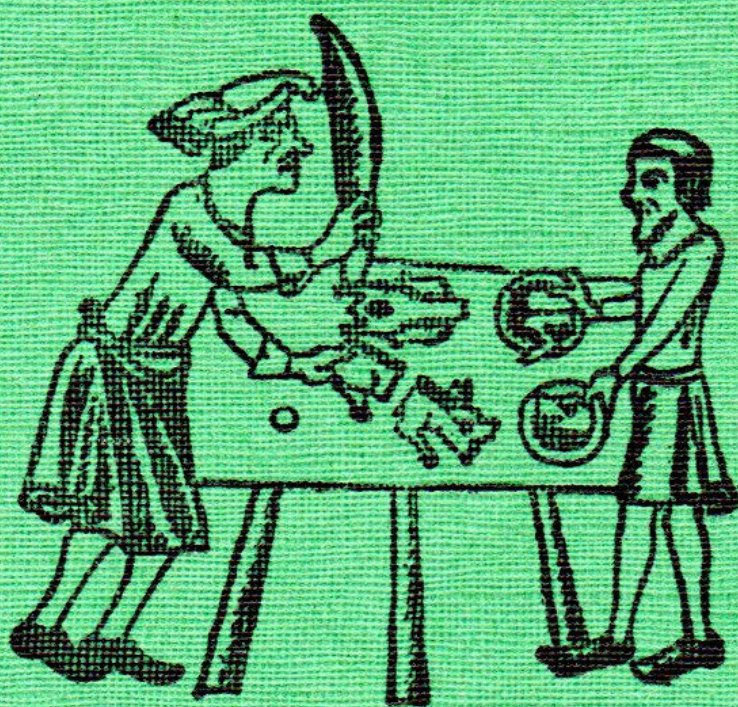


History Bookshelves

LIFE IN A
MANOR HOUSE

BY
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DRAWINGS BY H. WEISSENBORN



GINN

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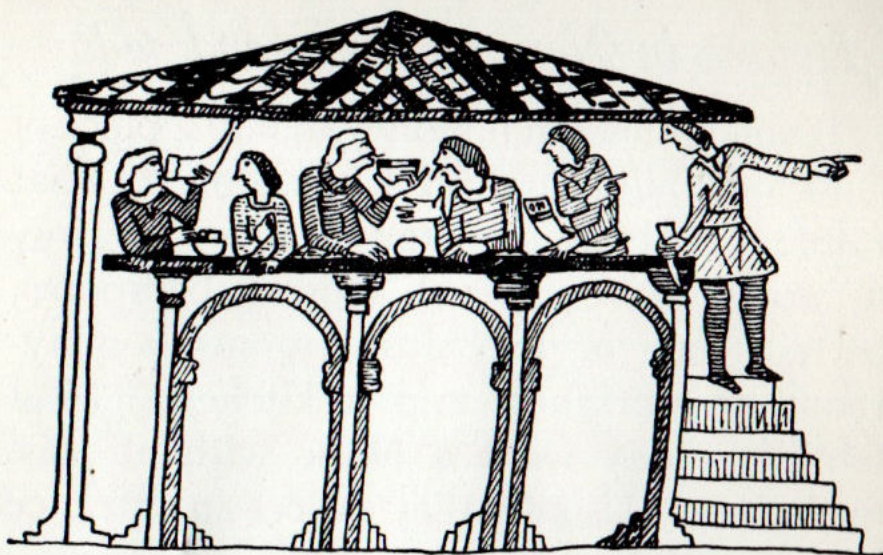
Houses in Norman times and today

If you had enough money to buy a piece of land and build yourself a house on it, what would your house be like? Almost certainly it would have several rooms: bedrooms, perhaps one or two sitting-rooms, a play-room or workshop and a kitchen. Most families today want a house with at least five rooms. Usually they expect an entrance hall as well, but do not count it as a room.

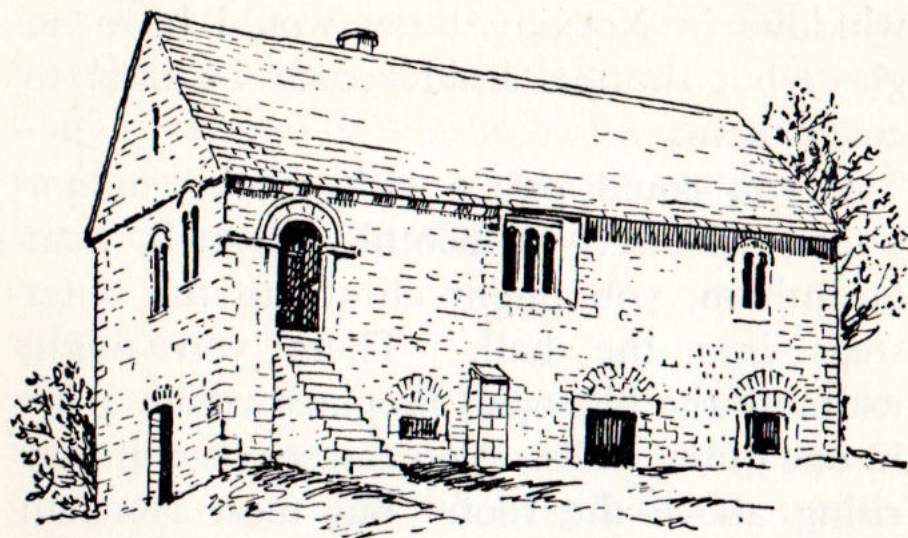
When William the Conqueror came to England, there were none of the five- and six-roomed houses which are built in all parts of England today. A peasant's home was a hut with one small room or perhaps two. The lord of a manor planned his home with one chief room, the hall.

The Norman hall

Those who have read *Homes of the Angles and Saxons* will remember that the leaders of the Angles and Saxons used to build for their houses big wooden halls, like great barns. When William I came to England such wooden halls were still being built, but some halls were different. Look at the



picture of Harold's hall at Bosham in Sussex. This is taken from a needlework picture in the Bayeux Tapestry, so it is not meant as a copy of the mansion. It shows, however, a house made in two storeys. The hall, where Harold and his friends are feasting, is in the upper storey. It is approached by an outside stair. The lower storey is built of stone and is made with an arched ceiling. Probably this lower floor was used as a cellar for storing food and drink and all the other things which were needed when there was no shop round the corner. The upper storey is probably of wood. It has a roof of wooden tiles called shingles. If the picture had been a proper drawing of the outside of



the hall, you would not have been able to see the people inside having their meal. Norman houses had small windows which were usually rather high up.

Look at the picture of the manor house which is shown on this page. It is the same sort of house as Harold's house at Bosham, though it is all made of stone. You can see that the main door is on the first floor and that steps lead up to it. The doorway is like many other Norman doorways. It has a round-arched top. The three sets of smaller windows also go back to Norman times. You can see the round arch above each of them. The window set in a square frame was made three hundred years later by someone who wanted to make the hall lighter. The

windows in Norman times would have no glass, but shutters inside could be used to cover them.

If you could pay a visit to this manor house, which is at Boothby Pagnell, near Grantham, you might climb up the outer steps into the hall. There you might examine the big open fireplace which is set in one of the walls. You can see its chimney rising above the roof. But most Norman halls had the fire in the middle of the room. Instead of a chimney there was a lantern-shaped opening in the centre of the roof to let out the smoke.

In the hall the lord of the manor, his family, his friends and his servants all had their meals. It was usual for the master, his lady and older members of his family to sit with their guests at a table placed across one end of the hall. The table was erected on a low platform called a dais. It was called the high table. Other members of the household sat at trestle tables set lengthwise down the hall. In between meals these tables and benches could be cleared away. For in the hall the lord gave orders to his servants; he held courts where tenants who had behaved badly to him or to each other were tried and

told their punishment. In the hall the women of the household might spin, children might play and those who had nothing better to do might gossip. On the tables and benches men of the household slept.

THE BOWER

The man who built this manor house, like others, did not want always to live in public. Only two-thirds of the length of the upper floor is taken up by the hall. The other third is made into a separate room. This is the private room of the master and his family. It is the bower. Readers of *English Castles* will know that this room in Orford Castle was called the grand chamber. Such a room might also be called the great chamber. Where possible it was placed on the sunny side of the hall and might be known as the solar, the sun-room. In the solar the lord of the manor and his wife might sit on their great bed while they entertained their guests. Some guests sat on the chests in which clothes were kept. (Even in the late part of the thirteenth century, two hundred years after the Norman Conquest, we hear of a king, Edward I, and his wife, sitting on their bed to receive their guests.)

THE CELLARS

The two rooms below the hall at Boothby Pagnell might surprise you. They were vaulted, that is, roofed in stone with curved arches. You may think that this would make these cellars look like a church, but the Normans did not think that way. They liked a stone building to have a stone ceiling. Besides, it could not catch fire.

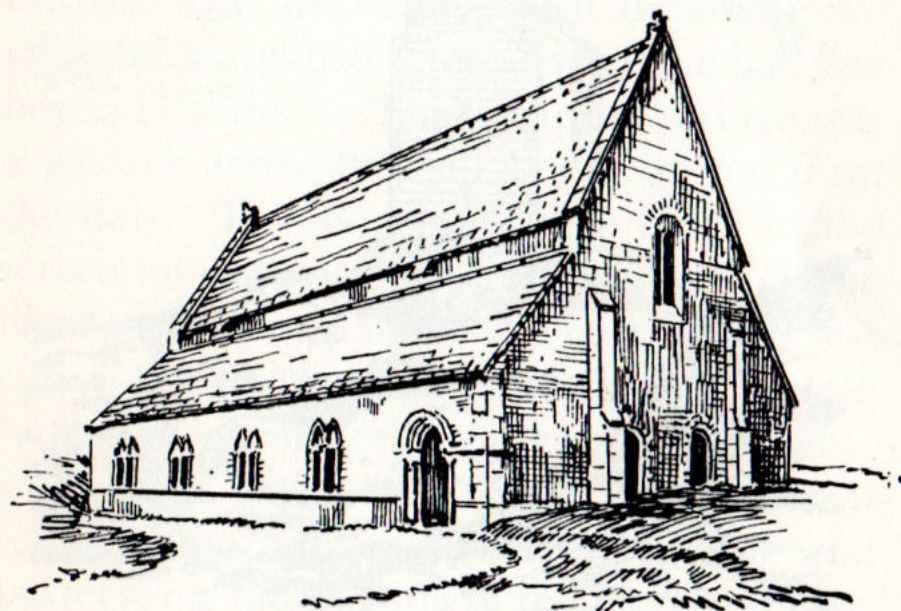
THE KITCHEN

Readers may be wondering all this time, Where did the family do their cooking? People in this manor house may have done their cooking in an outside building which has since been destroyed. Outside kitchens were quite usual. On page 6 in *English Monasteries* is a picture of a famous one which is still standing. It is the abbot's kitchen at Glastonbury Abbey. You can see the lantern in the roof which let out smoke from the fire.

MANOR HOUSES OF DIFFERENT SHAPES AND SIZES

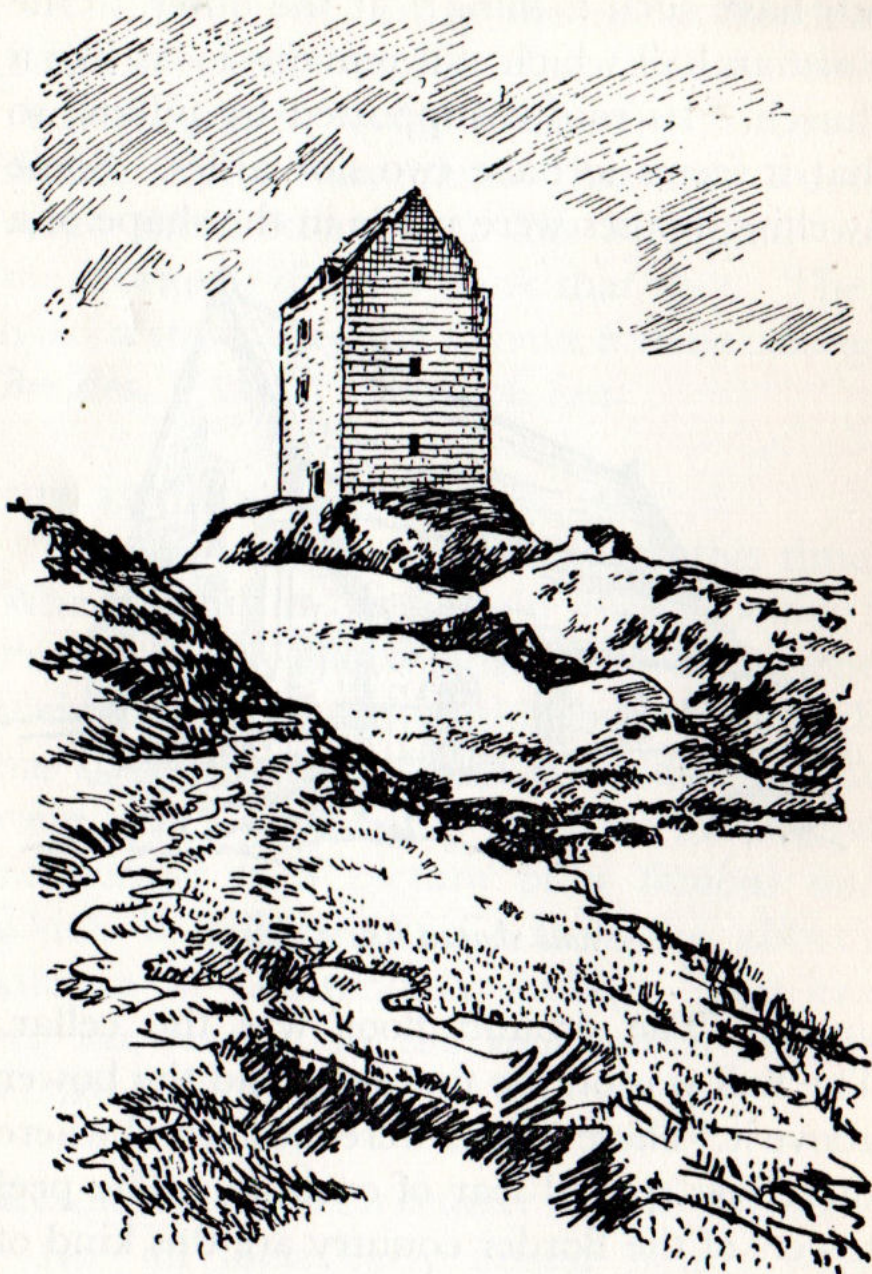
Not all these early manor houses were built with the hall on the first floor. Sometimes the hall was built, like the Saxon hall, on ground level. The bower was made at

one end and a ground-floor cellar (if you can have such a thing!) at the other. One Norman hall which still remains looks like a church. Its roof is supported by pillars, so that it seems to have two side aisles. Some dwelling-houses were made in the shape of a



The hall shaped like a church

tower. The ground floor was the cellar. The hall was on the first floor and the bower above it. These towers were most usual where there was special fear of enemies. The peel towers of the Border country are this kind of house. The Scots and English often crossed the Border to raid each other's homes and 'lift' each other's cattle.

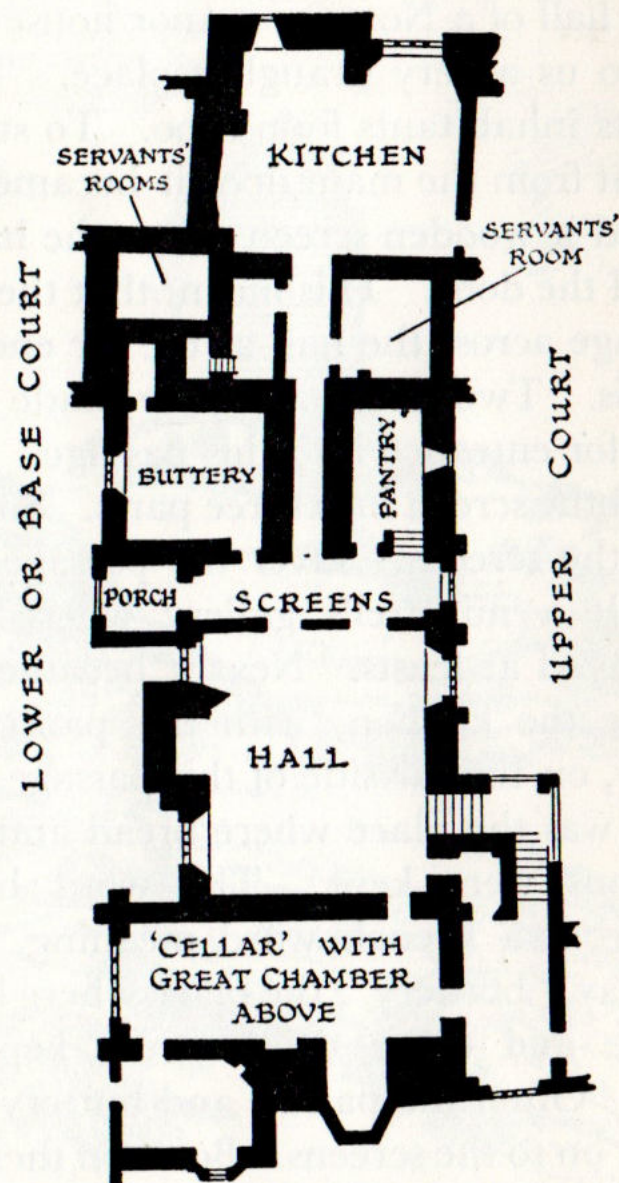


A peel tower in Scotland today

How manor houses were enlarged

The hall of a Norman manor house would seem to us a very draughty place. That is what its inhabitants found too. To stop the draught from the main door it became usual to build a wooden screen across the hall just beyond the door. This meant that there was a passage across the hall at the far end from the dais. Two doorways were made in the screen for entrance into this passage. These divided the screen into three parts. So it was called the screens. Over the passage could be built a minstrel's gallery where music was played at feasts. Next it became usual to have the kitchen, with the pantry and buttery, on the far side of this passage. The pantry was the place where bread and other provisions were kept. The word buttery came from a French word meaning, as we might say, 'bottlery', the place where bottles of wine and other drinks were kept and served. Often the pantry and buttery faced directly on to the screens. Between them was a passage which ran back to the kitchen.

The plan on page 10 shows this arrangement at a great house called Haddon Hall in



The central buildings of Haddon Hall

Derbyshire. In this house the hall was built in the fourteenth century. It was built from the ground floor, two storeys high. At the south end of the hall was the cellar, with the solar above it. On the north side, with the kitchen, buttery, and pantry, were other servants' rooms. The owner who built the hall and these two sets of rooms, set them across the middle of an older fortified courtyard. This meant that there were now two courtyards, an upper court and a base court. At one corner of the base court was the gate-house, at the other a Norman chapel. In one corner of the upper court was a strong tower. In time new buildings were added—more servants' rooms, cellars, guest rooms, a long gallery—till there were buildings all round both courtyards. Now, if you go to look at the house, you will find it as it was in the sixteenth century, two hundred years after the hall was built. But, though most of the windows have been given square frames, you will see that the hall still has two big windows of the kind that were fashionable in the fourteenth century. They are long windows with pointed arches at the top. The stone-work of the upper part of the windows is traceried, that is, cut into

patterns. You can see this kind of window in many churches and cathedrals. Glass in the fourteenth century was being more freely used both in churches and halls, so that large windows did not mean that the building was draughty. Some of the glass used was stained-glass, coloured glass such as you see in churches.



Preparing the hall for dinner

Who made up the household in a great manor house such as Haddon Hall at the end of the fourteenth century? Watch the preparations for dinner and you will see. The *marshal* carrying his staff comes into the hall. With him are his helpers, the yeoman-usher and the groom. The marshal watches while the boards are raised on the trestles

and the benches put in place. Now he has sent the groom out to fetch more wood for the fire, for it is winter time. After Good Friday the fireplace may be filled with a holly bush.

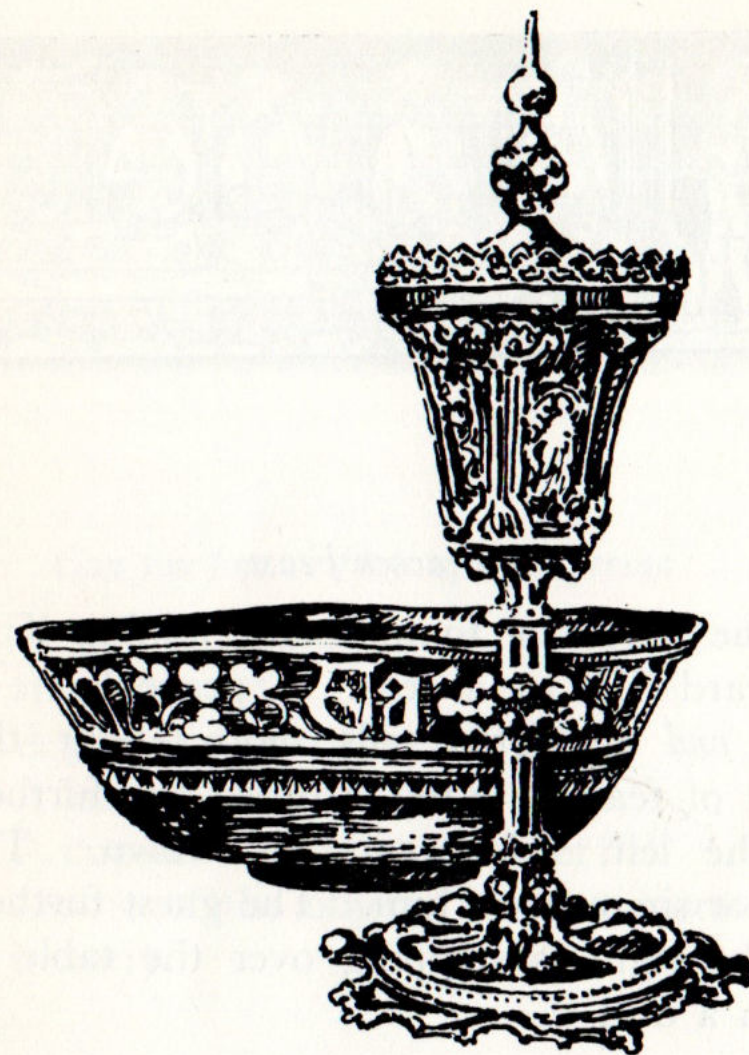
Here comes the *butler* with one of his helpers to lay the high table. The long linen cloths which they carry are not wide enough to stretch right across the table and hang down on each side, so they arrange two cloths carefully all along the table and join them with a fold in the middle. Then the butler lays a clean cover on top of a cupboard which stands nearby. Out of this cupboard he brings jugs and basins. The diners will need fresh water to wash their hands both before and after dinner, for there are no forks to save fingers from grease. Now the butler has vanished through the screens at the back of the hall. He has gone to the pantry. Back he comes, with a long towel draped round his neck. One end of it lies along his left arm. On this he has laid several new rolls and some square slices of stale whole-meal bread. In his left hand is a small salt cellar. In his right hand, wrapped in the other end of the towel, he carries spoons and knives. He is going to lay his lord's place at the table.

The butler sets the salt cellar at the lord's right hand. Next to it he lays one or two slices of bread. These slices, of bread four days old, are trenchers. They serve as plates. Now he lays down the knife and next to it the rolls. (The lord is the only person who is offered new bread. The other people at his table, unless special guests, eat bread one day old.) Now he has laid a spoon upon the lord's napkin at his left hand.

The rest of the table must be laid. The butler sees that the lady of the house and all others who share the honour of dining at his master's table each has a place properly laid, with knife and spoon, trenchers, napkin and bread, and with the salt cellar near at hand.

Along comes the *panter*. He is carrying more loaves from the pantry, all squared off with a sharp knife and cut into trenchers. He lays extra trenchers at the end of the high table. Now all is ready on the dais except for the alms-dish. Into this dish at each meal goes food for the poor.

The butler and his helpers go to the other tables. At every place there must be a napkin, trenchers and a cup for ale. There must be plenty of bread for the servants, three days old, and small salt cellars too.



A wine cup for a special guest, with a mazer behind it

The household at dinner

It is ten o'clock. The hour for dinner has come. The lord with his lady, his guests and, perhaps, his eldest son and daughter, enter



A Peacock Feast

The Mayor of Lynn is entertaining King Edward III to a feast of peacocks. (*A Port and a Pilgrim* tells more about this kind of feast.) King Edward sits furthest to the left. He wears his crown. The mayor sits next to him. The guest furthest to the right is stepping over the table to fetch a dish.

Can you find in front of each person

1. A pile of trenchers of bread cut into star shapes?
2. A pile of slices of bread?
3. A knife?
4. A cup on a stand or a mazer?
(Some of the objects are drawn rather queerly.)

Can you see

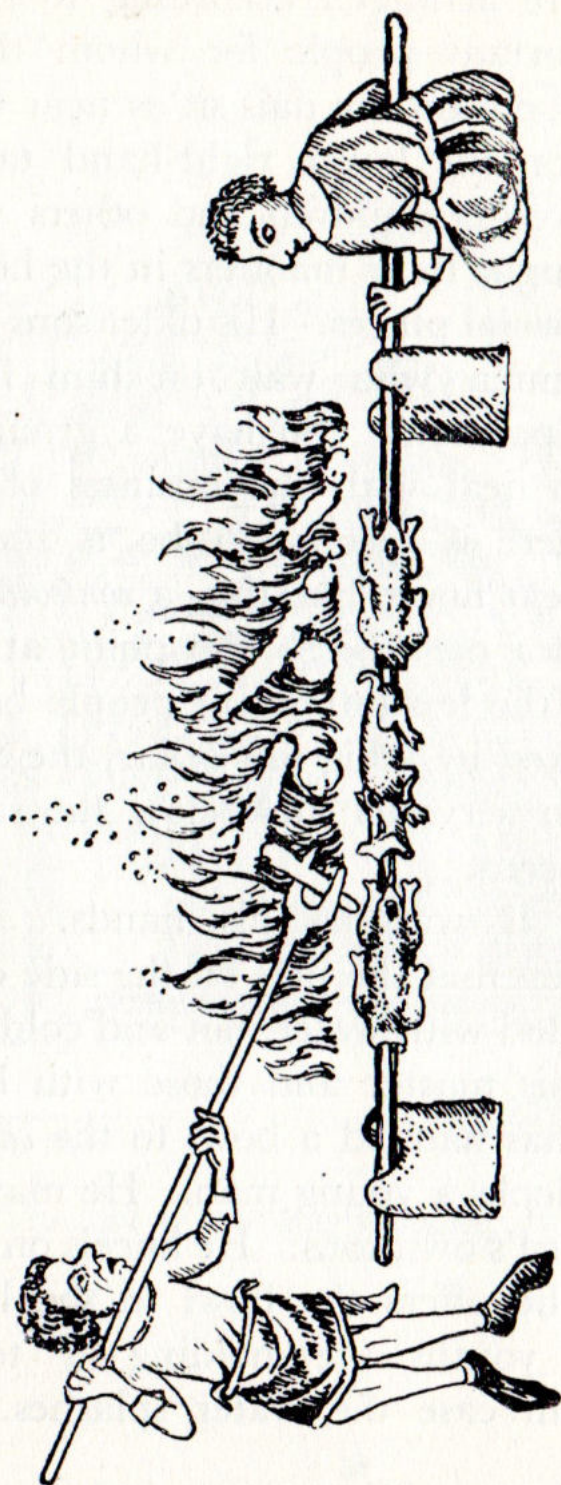
1. Two peacocks on dishes?
2. A minstrel? The other minstrels at this feast are shown on pages 26 and 32.



The hall of the king's palace, Westminster

from the great chamber. The rest of the household are arranged according to their rank. Important people for whom there may be no room on the dais sit as near to it as possible on the lower right-hand table. The lord's young children and others who are being taught their manners in the house have their special places. His older sons and other gentlemen who wait on him have honourable positions. So have a group of officials who deal with the business of the manor. There is certain to be a *steward* and, in a great house like this, a *controller*, a *treasurer*, and a *chancellor*. The point at the table where the less important people begin to sit is marked by a big salt cellar, the Salt. All the lower servants sit 'below the salt', near the screens.

The lord is washing his hands. The *ewerer* has seen that the jugs on the side cupboard are filled with water, hot and cold, for the use of his master and those with him. The butler has handed a bowl to the *carver*. The carver looks a young man. He may be one of the lord's own sons. He kneels on one knee while he offers the bowl to the lord. Two other youths are holding a towel beneath it in case the water splashes. A

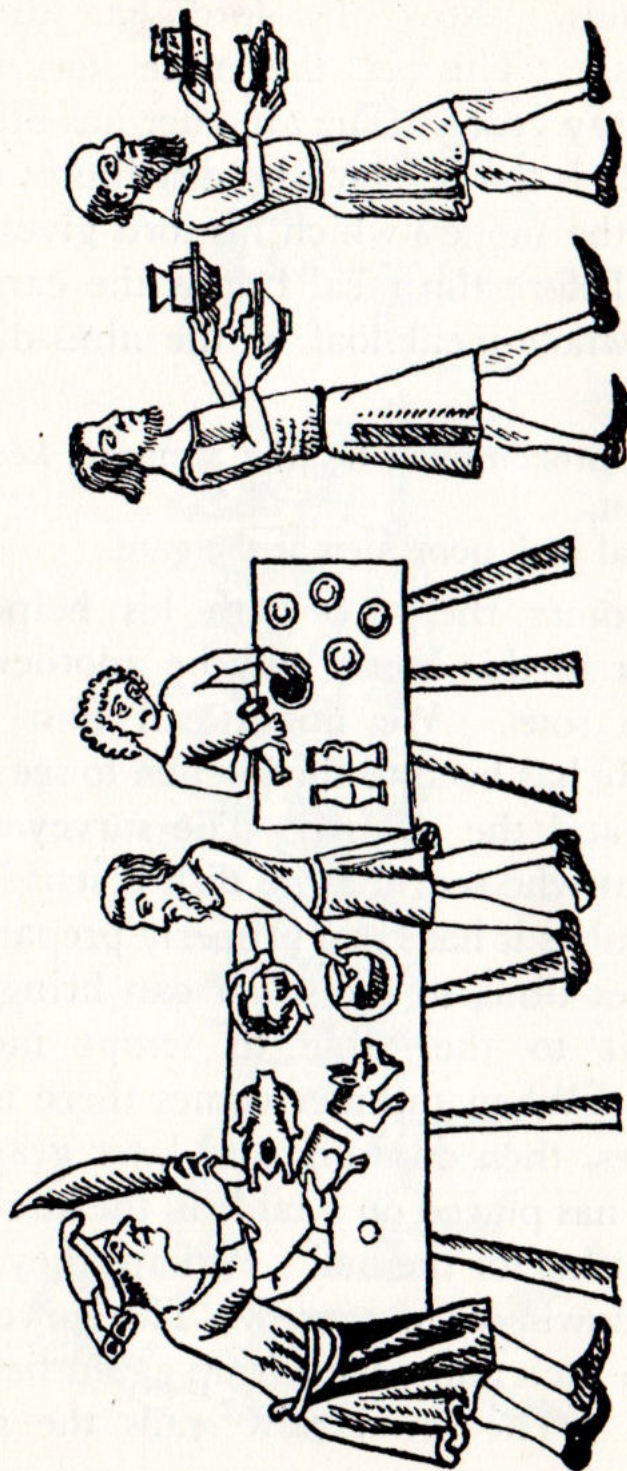


A cook and a turnspit roast chickens and a baby pig

third gentleman pours the water over the lord's hands. Now the lord has dried his hands. This is the time for the *almoner* to say grace. The almoner has other duties. He is the person who distributes the food and the money which his lord gives to charity. Before the meal begins the carver places a whole-meal loaf in the alms-dish, but also

all the broken meat he [the almoner] keeps,
I wot,
To deal with poor men at the gate.

Here comes the *sewer* with his helpers. The sewer in this house may be another of the lord's sons. We might call him the server. He has been to the kitchen to see the *chief cook* and the *surveyor*. The surveyor is the servant who sees that no dish is sent into the hall unless it has been properly prepared. It is winter time, so the sewer can bring no fresh fruit to the table to tempt men's appetites. When summer comes there may be cherries, then damsons and later grapes. The cook has placed on a table in the kitchen the first dishes for the hall. Perhaps they are covered bowls of 'pottage'. The surveyor looks into each and covers it up again before it is cold. The sewer now leads the pro-

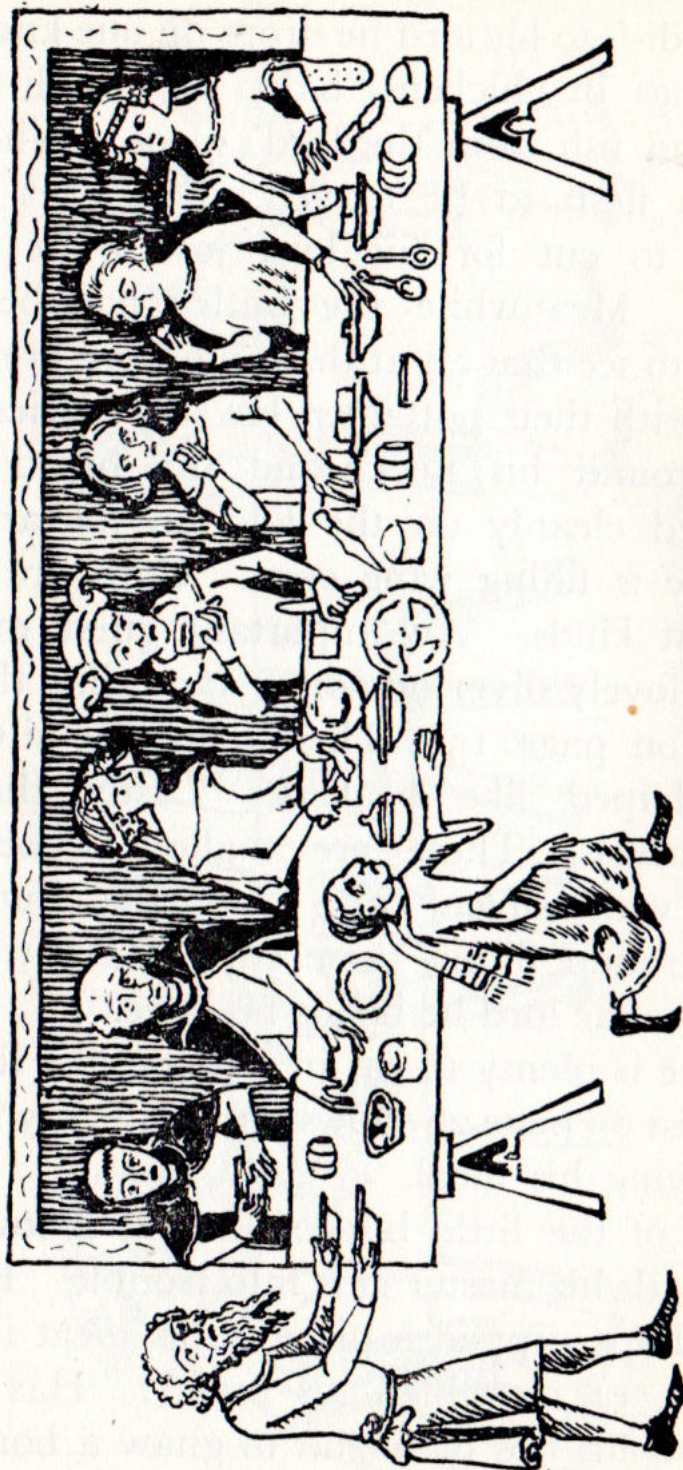


The cook is serving fresh roasted pork

cession of servants into the hall. When he offers a dish to his lord he drops on one knee. He brings in chickens, baby pigs on little spits, and fish from the lord's pool. When there is flesh to be carved, the carver is careful to cut for his lord just what he desires. Meanwhile the butler has been careful to see that all at the table have bread to eat with their pottage. He still carries a towel round his neck, and the bread is balanced cleanly on the fold on his arm. Now he is filling wine cups. Cups are of different kinds. An important guest may have a lovely silver one on a stand, like that shown on page 15. Then there are silver cups shaped like beakers. Lastly there are mazers. These are shallow wooden bowls with silver rims. As the butler moves round filling these cups, every time he passes the lord he bends his knee.

There is plenty to eat in a house like this, as the list on page 26 shows, but not everyone is enjoying his meal.

One of the little boys sitting at a lower table with his master gets into trouble. Has he, perhaps, dipped a piece of his meat into the salt, or crumbled his bread? Has he smacked his lips or begun to gnaw a bone?



What can you see on this lord's table?

Many other things, too, are forbidden.

Thou shalt not laugh nor speak nothing
While thy mouth be full of meat or drink.
Nor sup them not with great sounding,
Neither pottage nor other thing.

Also eschew [avoid], without strife
To foul the board-cloth with thy knife.
Nor blow not on thy drink or meat,
Neither for cold, neither for heat.

The marshal is prowling round. Two servants at the back of the hall are quarrelling. They see the marshal and are silent. Besides, the *avener*, the man in charge of the stables, is looking at them. Perhaps they are two of his grooms.

Another man seated in the hall is the *chandler*. When darkness comes everyone will be glad of his work. At supper time the hall will be lighted by the tall wax candles called 'perchers' which he has made. These will be placed in sockets, but he also makes 'prickets' which can be fastened on to spikes. He makes the torches, too, which give light to the people who enter the courtyard.

SOME DISHES WHICH MIGHT BE EATEN IN THE HALL
Pottages and broths: often made with vegetables.

Fish: dried cod, pounded and seasoned with spices:
salt herrings, made into pies; salmon and trout,
roasted on a gridiron; bream and roach, boiled in
ale, salt and water.

Meat: Venison, pork or veal, roasted; beef or mutton,
chopped up, boiled, pounded into a pulp and
seasoned with spices.

Game birds and poultry: swans, cranes, pheasants,
geese, peacocks, gulls, herons, partridges, chickens,
pigeons, roasted or made into pies.

Sweets: pancakes; fritters; cheese-cakes; egg custard;
fruit tarts and pies; fruit fools made with pounded
quinces, pears, cherries or strawberries, boiled.

FRUITS FOUND AT A GREAT LORD'S TABLES

apples	mulberries	olives
pears	plums	peaches
cherries	medlars	grapes
strawberries	oranges	figs
quinces	lemons	

VEGETABLES USED IN PREPARING DISHES

peas	onions	mushrooms
leeks	parsnips	nettles
cabbages	beetroots	



How the family pass the day

The lord has been busy before dinner giving orders to his servants. Now if his guests do not need his attention he may spend some hours with his steward and treasurer looking through his household accounts. When spring comes he looks forward to riding round his estates with a bailiff or reeve, seeing that all is being cultivated as he thinks it should be. (*Work on a Manor* tells about farming.) Sometimes he will go hunting or hawking. His wife looks forward to a holiday too, to go hawking. But in winter time she stays at home. She has plenty to do.



This morning she has found out how things are going in the brewery, the bakery and the dairy. Of course, the steward is in charge of the servants who work in the kitchen and the dairy, and of the baker and the brewer too. But a good mistress does not trust her steward too far! 'Many are false, but few are true', says the rhyme. After dinner she may sit with her daughters and her ladies, while they stitch or spin. She may enquire too, how her little sons are behaving. Are they learning as they ought?

The boys of the house have been up since six o'clock. These young pages found their clothes already brushed for them, for they have servants to wait on them. But each has to dress himself, wash his face and hands, comb his hair and rinse out his mouth with fresh water. Then when he has said his private prayer he must go to the chapel for the service of Mass. On the way he must say 'good morning' politely to all whom he meets. The ladies of the family have been at Mass too. After Mass the boys had some meat and bread and ale before they set to work on their Latin and French. The girls may not learn more Latin than is needed for them to read their prayer books, but the boys

learn more. All children are expected to study books written in French. The girls today may have been reading aloud stories about the lives of saints.

Perhaps this morning one or other of the boys has narrowly escaped a beating. The Latin lesson was dull and there were far more interesting things to think about. The boy may have been wondering if he could escape to the porter's lodge in the gate-house. If he could peep out, he could see if anyone was sitting in the stocks outside. Or he might wonder what there was for dinner, or what they would learn in the afternoon. Would there be piping or dancing? And would the ground be still too thick in mud for riding? But to let your eyes wander from your book was dangerous. The master's hand moved to the birch rod upon his desk.

Bedtime

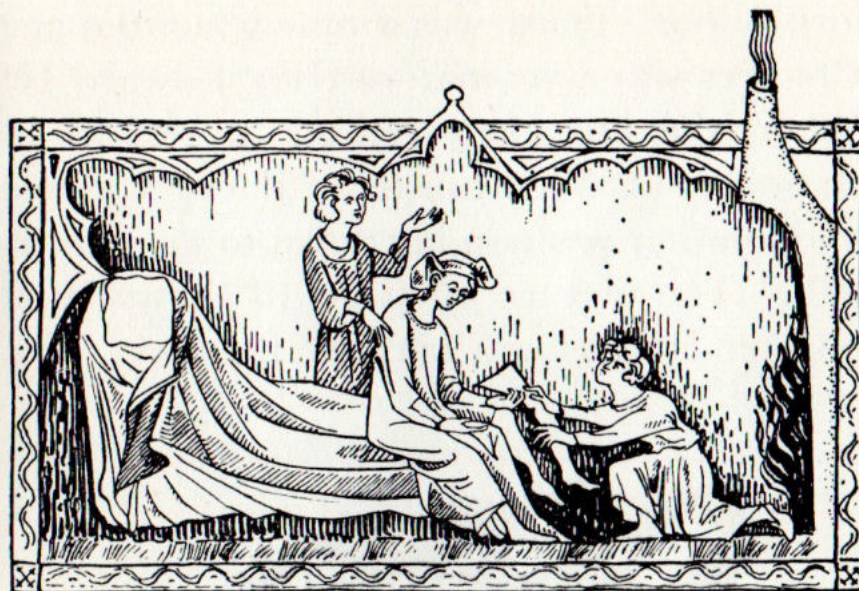
There is plenty of time for more work and play between a ten o'clock dinner and supper time at five o'clock. After supper, before the lord and his family retire to bed, certain of the servants must set to work to prepare their rooms for them.

The marshal is in charge of the servants who work in the hall, but there is an usher or head chamberlain in charge of the private rooms. His grooms make the straw pallets for the beds and hang the tapestry curtains that are drawn round them. They bring up fuel for the fire in the lord's chamber and set up trestles and boards for any private meal. They bring up hot water for the use of the ladies and perchers to light the sleeping chambers.

The lord himself receives special attention. The chamberlain sees that his feather mattress has been well beaten-up and that his blankets and sheets are clean. There must be a clean head sheet at the head of the bed, too.

Look at the picture on the opposite page. It is a winter night. The lord is retiring to bed. The chamberlain is doing as he has been taught. He and some of his yeomen know they must have a clear fire burning, with plenty of extra wood to make it up. Also they know these rules:

When [your lord] has supped and goes to his chamber . . . take off his gown. . . . Put a mantle on his back to keep his body from cold . . . and pull off his shoes, socks and hosen and throw

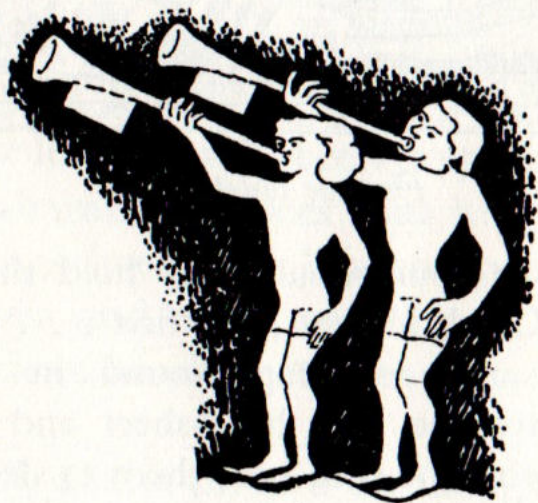


Fireside toilet

these last over your shoulder or hold them on your arm. Comb his hair, but first . . . put on his kerchief and nightcap wound in seemly fashion. Have the bed, head-sheet and pillow ready; and when he is in bed, there to sleep safe and sound, draw the curtains round the bed, set there his night-light, . . . and see there is enough to last the night, drive out the dog and the cat, giving them a clout, take no leave of your lord, but bow low to him and retire.

The chamberlain gives a last look at the night-light. It is a percher, a great big wax candle. Then he takes his own little taper and goes downstairs to his bed. The yeoman lies down on the floor to sleep outside his

lord's door. There was a time when the poet Chaucer was a yeoman of King Edward III. When the king had retired to rest in his chamber at Westminster Palace, Chaucer and another yeoman lay down to sleep in the hall. The picture on page 18 shows Westminster Hall as you may see it today.



Things to do

1. Choose a birthday dinner from the list on page 26.
2. Make a list of the duties of a butler in the hall.
3. Write two lists of rules, one of good manners in a fourteenth-century hall, one of good manners at school dinner today.
4. Collect pictures, or make pictures, of as many of the fruits and vegetables in the list on page 26 as you can.
5. Write down the names of fruits and vegetables which we now use which are not on the lists on page 26.



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Edited by Catherine B. Firth

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